

Hook

The year's most eagerly awaited new release arrives here amid tales of box office disaster in the States. Can it really be true that wonder director Stephen Spielberg has stumbled for the last time or is it all a bad rumour put out by critics who don't believe in fairies? Into the maelstrom we throw Dave Reeder (pro) and Karen Young (con) to slug it out. But first, the plot.

● It began with a simple idea. What if the "boy who never grew up" did? That simple idea was all it took to clear the seven year log-jam that the development of a new *Peter Pan* film had become – at that stage an update of the classic Disney feature cartoon.

Peter Banning (Williams) is a 40 year old executive, who lives for his business. He ignores his wife Moira, he disappoints his children Jack and Maggie, but is committed to a Christmas trip to London to help the dedication ceremony of a new wing for the Gt. Ormond Street Hospital, honouring his wife's grandmother, Wendy Darling (Smith).

There the tensions between family and business raise a nemesis from his forgotten past – evil Captain Hook breaks free from Neverland and kidnaps Banning's children. He refuses to believe Wendy's assertion that he is Pan but is partly convinced by the arrival of Tinkerbell the fairy (Roberts).

In Neverland, the pair sneak up on the pirate ship, to see Hook and Smee (Hoskins) gloating over the captain children. At last, claims Hook, there will be revenge! Banning steps forward but Hook refuses to believe this is his old enemy – he can have his children back but only if he fights for them.

Banning falls overboard and wakes in the Nevertree, surrounded by the Lost Boys who represent his only hope of rescue. Yet they refuse to believe this old, fat man is The Pan – until one of them sees past the facade. They train him until they feel ready to take on Hook. Meanwhile, the wily old pirate has been hard at work, trying to convince the kids that their parents don't love them. Don't you want to be a pirate, he breathes at Jack. The boy shifts his loyalty – Hook shows him all the concern and love his father hasn't time for.

At a specially arranged baseball game in which Jack triumphs, Banning sees what happens and retreats to the Nevertree in despair. There he suddenly realises what his 'happy thought' is – the one thing that will enable him to fly. It's his family. Suddenly he's back – Pan the eternal child.

Hook gets his battle. Pan, naturally, is triumphant. The family returns to reality and there, in London, Peter Banning has changed irrevocably. He resolves to stay young at heart, even if he can't stay young in body.



HOOK – A QUALIFIED SUCCESS

Okay, there are problems here (*writes Dave Reeder*) but overall I think *Hook* works and, on its own terms, works triumphantly. Peter Pan is one of those typically British phenomena that hooks (sorry) us into a mental straitjacket of belief. Spielberg could never hope to satisfy our own visions of the character, so he gives us another.

There's all the things here you've come to expect from a Spielberg extravaganza (strange how a number of directors now seem to be selling themselves as commodity items) such as fast-paced actions, sensitive child performances, imaginative sweep, equal parts of thrills and pathos, stunning sets and, most importantly, an experience.

So we get a world in which, whilst we think we need a Pan, we come to terms with the fact that we also need a Hook. Without the sharp focus of evil, there's nothing for good to relate to. An encounter with Hook thus becomes the means for us to transcend personal problems and emerge refreshed; this starts to tie together the Freudian elements of the film. It may have become the most expensive therapy ever.

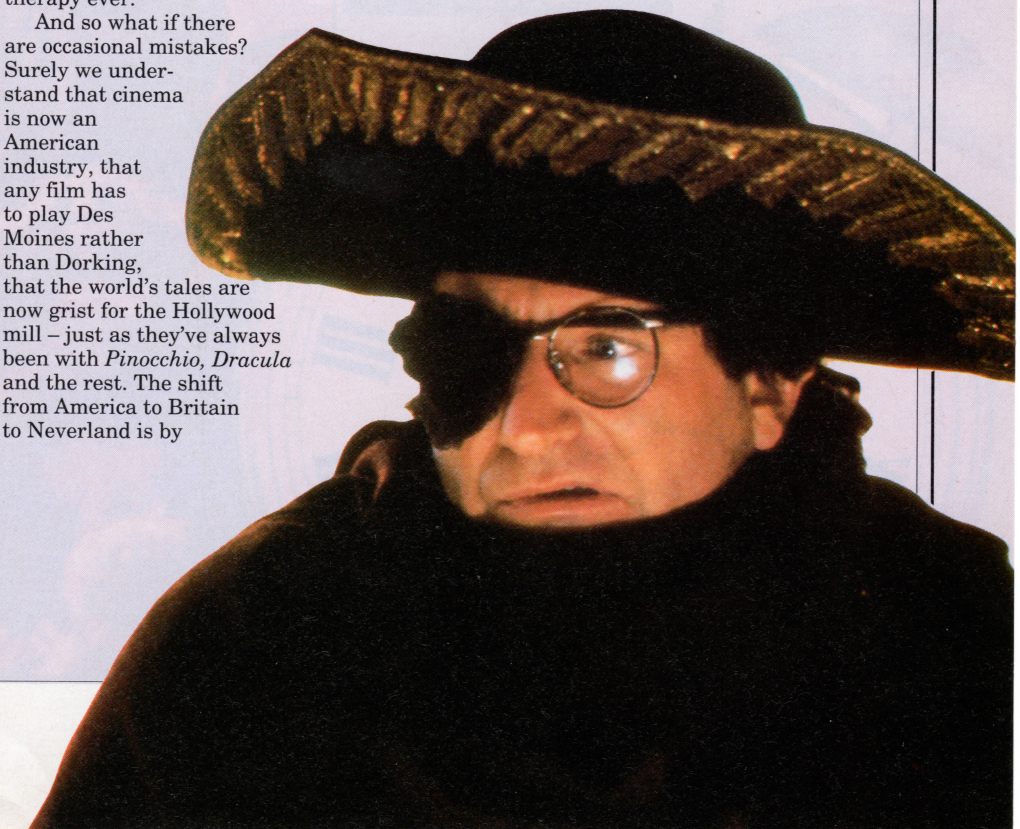
And so what if there are occasional mistakes? Surely we understand that cinema is now an American industry, that any film has to play Des Moines rather than Dorking, that the world's tales are now grist for the Hollywood mill – just as they've always been with *Pinocchio*, *Dracula* and the rest. The shift from America to Britain to Neverland is by

necessity a progression, with the Britain of American imagination a halfway stop to fantasy anyway.

And the acting. Williams confirms himself as a masterly serious performer, rather than just an impressive improvisational mimic; Hoffman for once has great fun with a part that forces him to react (and react strongly) with other actors; Smith is both moving and majestic, showing at 90 the girl that Pan loved; Hoskins has fun as usual; and busy brat Charlie Korsmo turns in a sensitive role, before his 'permanent' retirement to be just 'an ordinary kid' for a while. Only one mistake: Roberts as a knowing Tinkerbell, with none of the freshness the part needs.

There's even a quick cameo from Glenn Close as a pirate, complete with beard and chest wig – you'll have to be fast to catch her though.

Of course, this could never be another *Peter Pan* – the book, the play, the film. Instead, it's a glorious affirmation of the joys of youth with the kind of 'feel good' attitude aimed straight at the heart of family audiences. See it as a group, that way you'll each get your own enjoyment from it. I think the film's a disappointment, not a disaster.





Hook

HOOK - AN UNQUALIFIED DISASTER

Oh please, can we talk? (*writes Karen Young*). Rarely, if ever, have I seen an entire audience of critics so deeply depressed by a preview. For days the phone lines crackled - 'Am I alone, or was it *really* as bad as that?' Of course, part of the problem is that seemingly unfathomable Yankie appetite for schmaltz that comes rock hard up against the caustic British critical sense; part also is the sheer indulgence that spends (what?) \$70m on a kid's movie - and that doesn't even include fees for the main principals who're all on deferred

payments out of projected profits; but mostly it's down to the increasing inability of mega movie moguls to watch the details when they're composing the broad strokes or watch the overall effect when they're finetuning the detail. Was I, for example, the only one to notice the American speech patterns ('Moor, why do you walk in back of me?') that littered *Robin Hood: Prince of Cliches*? And it's the same here.

For instance? Well, it's hard to know where to start. There's the bizarre movement of the Darling home about London: Peter flies from there from south of the Thames over Big Ben when he leaves for Neverland, he crashlands



back from there in Kensington Gardens, just around the corner from the house but, of course, north of the river – and this, natch, is the 'lord luv ya' London we last saw in all its accurate period detail in *Mary Poppins*. Then there's Phil Collins' police inspector who appears to be wearing a clip-on police badge on the outside of his jacket. Or the BIG close-up of Peter's watch that Hook gets his son to smash that has, quite clearly, a badly stuck-on label proclaiming 'Sheffield' on its face. Or the bizarre technical advances of Neverland – they can imagine skateboards and baseball kit into reality but nobody's thought about preventive dentistry?

Or let's talk politics for a moment? Leave aside the fact that Tinkerbell (Julia Roberts? Get serious!) is now some kind of fully sexual being who can grow to full size but doesn't stay that way and think about the Lost Boys. How come all of a sudden they're all American and half of them are black? Was that Barrie's vision or are we being Politically Correct? And how come Wendy Darling was able to arrange adoption for Peter in America – international adoption is hard enough now, let alone back in the mid-60s.

Ah, yes, the mid-60s. This, I'm afraid, was when the film lost me forever. Banning/ Pan proclaims proudly at one stage that 'in the Sixties' he didn't do drugs, he was an accountant. Nice joke, but a little sour when we have the later flashback showing the precise point when Pan (What? Age 13 or so, wouldn't you say?) became Banning: kissing Wendy's teenage granddaughter Moira, under a poster for *Help* (d. Richard Lester, 1965). An awfully young accountant ...

And so it goes. We haven't talked about how the film appears to be shot through cellophane – haven't these people heard of focus and depth of field? We haven't even talked about the Lost Boys' Nevertree playground which is so patently designed as an instant attraction at the Spielberg Fantasyworld Experience, whenever that opens. Equally, we haven't discussed some of the stunning material in the film – Hoffman unforgettable as Hook, the best pirate ship since *Captain Blood*, the genuine



chill when Hook trashes the Darling house, Hoskins (not so much chewing the scenery, as working his way through the cookbook, page by page), Smith as a sprightly 92 year old and, finally, all the long distance shots of Neverland as half antique map, half Maxfield Parrish painting.

Spielberg claims he made the film "for a simple reason: I thought my kids would like it". That's possible; my sadness is that I think not too many other people's will. It's too dark a vision for most children, too raucous (that old *Goonies* mania returns with the Lost Boys) for most adults. Of course, you'll have to go and see it anyway ...

Just don't expect to see me in the audience. I'll be at home listening to JM Barrie spinning, with my new mantra: "I don't believe in fairies. I don't believe in fairies. I don't ..."

Producers
KATHLEEN KENNEDY/FRANK
MARSHALL/GERALD R MOLEN

Director
STEPHEN SPIELBERG

Screenplay
JIM V HART/MALIA SCOTCH MARMO

Photography
DEAN CUNDEY

Music
JOHN WILLIAMS
(COLUMBIA-TRISTAR)

Peter Banning/Pan ROBIN WILLIAMS
Captain Hook DUSTIN HOFFMAN
Tinkerbell JULIA ROBERTS
Smee BOB HOSKINS
Granny Wendy DAME MAGGIE SMITH
Jack Banning CHARLIE KORSMO

THE HOOK COMPETITION

Thanks to those nice people at Columbia Tri-Star Films and Epic, we have a bundle of Hook goodies for you to win!

Here's the deal. We have ten super special Hook T-shirts, ten fabulous Hook caps and ten stunning Hook CD soundtracks to give away. The first five winners out of the hat will get the full range of kit and the next fifteen will get their choice of T-shirt, cap or CD.

To enter, just send your answers on a postcard to **I've Been Hooked Competition, Film Monthly, Argus House, Boundary Way, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 7ST** by April 10th – and ensure your name, address and choice of prize is on there as well as your answer! Usual rules and, please, only one entry each – else we'll have to send the crocodile after you and then there'll be tears before bedtime.

The questions. Just answer these three Oscar teasers:

1. Spielberg was originally to have directed Hoffman in *Rain Man* – who eventually directed the Oscar winner?
2. What film gave Robin Williams his first Oscar nomination as Best Actor?
3. Dame Maggie Smith has won two Oscars for Best Actress – name one of the films.

